



**CULTURAL
AND HISTORICAL
HERITAGE
in the Assenovgrad
country**

Септември

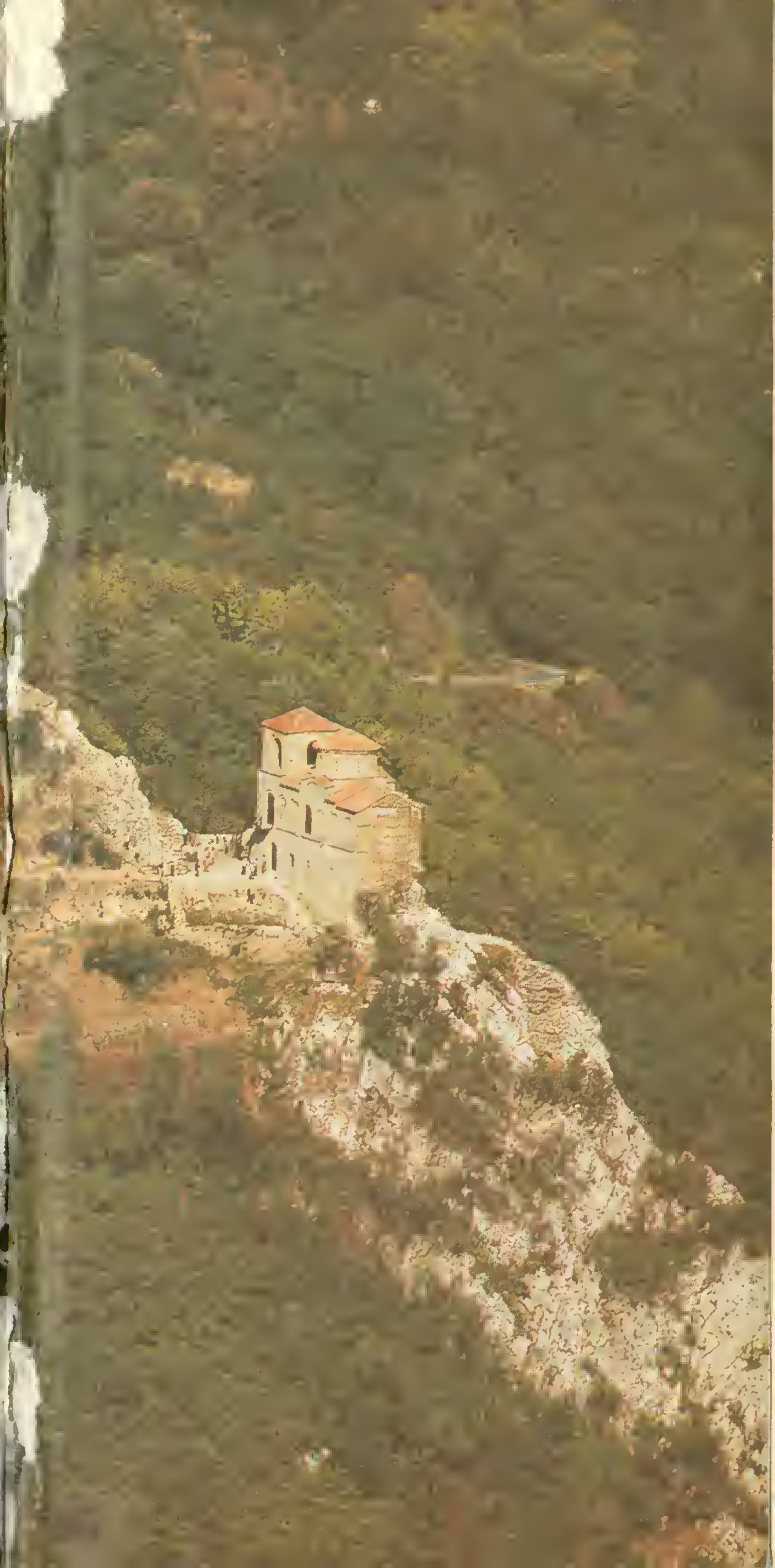
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CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE in the Assenovgrad country



SEPTEMVRI
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Assenovgrad lies at the foot of the Western Rhodopes, where the Assenitsa River escapes from the mountains into the Upper Thracian Lowlands. The town is flanked by the picturesque northernmost crests of the Rhodope Chernatitsa Ridge and the Dobrost Mountains.

The mild climate, the beautiful scenery and the strategical position of the locality were the basic factors which made the people settle on the territory of the present-day Assenovgrad Municipality and which has accounted for the development of material and spiritual culture there ever since antiquity.

The earliest history of the settlement is lost back in the millennia. The first settlers are assumed to have settled there circa the 7th millennium B.C. More durable traces were left later in time by the Thracian tribe of the Bessae. Romans, Byzantines and Latins followed in their tracks to be finally ousted from this beautiful country, which was to become a stronghold of the Bulgarian national spirit after the foundation and strengthening of the Bulgarian State.

Stanimaka, the old name of the town, was mentioned for the first time in the Statute of Bachkovo Monastery in 1083 as a settlement within the range of the monastery's property. According to Constantine Kostenechki, the translation of the Greek name Stanimaka is Tesnobran — a narrow pass, easy to defend.

The architectural monuments, which have survived through the centuries, stand as an eloquent proof of the skills of the old master builders, painters and wood-carvers, who reflected in their highly artistic works and architectural ensembles the strivings of the people and the natural beauty of their land.

A real treasure of the Assenovgrad county is the complex of unique medieval monuments. The most striking of these are the Ossuary (11th c.) and the Holy Archangels Church of Bachko

Monastery, the Our Lady of Petrich Church in Assen's Fortress and St Ian's Church in Assenovgrad. The fortification walls (part of which has been restored and is now on display) which then reached as high up as the Holy Archangel Height, protected the settlement from invasion and on the highest place the Bachkovo Monastery stood as a majestic castle.

In the time of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom Bachkovo Monastery developed into a veritable spiritual and cultural centre. With its help the St Petka Monastery in Mouldava, the St Kirik in Voden and the SS Vrachove in Kouklen were built in the vicinity. The common folk and the rulers spared no effort and money; they were building with enthusiasm, putting their heart into the task, and the painters covered the walls of the temples with images of the donors.

In 1371 the town shared the tragic lot of Plovdiv and the rest of the Bulgarian towns and villages conquered by the Ottoman Turks. The policy of conquest and assimilation pursued by the Ottoman Empire led to the destruction of hundreds of cultural monuments and to the decline in architecture. As the enslavers forbade the construction of high and spacious places of worship, unknown master builders made small churches, homely on the outside, but richly decorated inside. Several churches of that period have survived, among which the Dormition of the Virgin (1761—1765) stands out with its architecture and ornamentation.

The fabulous industriousness of the local people, whose main occupation was viticulture and wine-making, was the source from which the revival of Stanimaka drew strength after the devastation incursions of the *kurdjali*. In the 19th c. the domes of nine churches and over 40 chapels cropped up one after the other. The Dormition of the Virgin, the St Vassiliy and St Nikola in the old Convent district (now K. Kovachev residential district), the St George and the Annunciation of the Virgin in the ancient Ambelino district (now Pachovi brothers district), the temples of Holy Trinity and St Dimiter still evoke admiration with their architecture, wood-carved iconostases, with the wonderful murals and icons.

The majority of churches and monasteries are decorated by the then famous painters: Zahari, Georgi Danchov, Krustyu Zahariev, and by the local icon-painters Alexi Atanassov and Georgi Ksafov.

The St Nedelya Monastery was completed in 1868 near the village of Zlatovruh. It was there that the largest folk gatherings took place, for the service was held in the native Bulgarian tongue. The people who came from places nearby and faraway demonstrated their Bulgarian affiliation with multicolour folk costumes, painted carts, melodious songs and winding chain dances.

During the National Revival period well-to-do vine-growers, vintners, artisans and tradesmen built new two-storey houses with many bay windows, with deep wine cellars for the maturing of the famous Stanimaka wines, which were in high demand on the Turkish and West European markets. Enclosed by tall stone walls, with massive oak gates, the cool yards with beautiful marble fountains, vine arbours, box-shrubs and fig-trees were a pleasant place to

rest and chat in. Some of the houses as, for instance, the present Teachers' Club, the House of the Sun, the House with the Olympic Scenes, the Club of Metal-Workers, are richly decorated, with brightly painted walls and niches, wood-carved doors, walled-in cupboards and ceilings.

The history of the town is linked with the names of such great Bulgarian tsars as Kaloyan, Ivan Assen II, Ivan Alexander; with the Bulgarian Patriarch Euthymius; with the lifework of Paissiy of Hilendar, forefather of the Bulgarian National Revival; with the heroism of the antifascist resistance fighters. Many of these names are written in bronze and steel as a priceless legacy for the generations to come.

Rich is the cultural heritage of the Assenovgrad region. The monuments of culture, many of which are of nationwide significance, keep alive the memory of historical events. They are an invaluable treasure for the Bulgarian nation and are an evidence of the creative genius and unabating striving of the people after beauty and perfection.



THE HISTORY MUSEUM OF ASSENOVGRAD



The Museum was founded in 1971, in a building originally constructed in 1900 as the Officers' Club. It features 1000 exhibits on an area of 200 sq. m., distributed in three exhibition halls and four sections.

The Archaeology Section familiarizes the visitor with life in and around Assenovgrad since the year 7000 B.C. Stone and bone implements, objects of worship and everyday life are put on display. The Neolithic earthenware in the Museum impresses with its beauty and daring creativity. Very typical are the cult works of prehistorical sculpture and the zoomorphic vessels. There is a deers shaped ceramic vessel of amazing beauty found on the territory of Mouldava village.

Stone axes with holes, flat bone idols and earthenware items illustrate the development of man during the Chalcolithic period. A clay female idol symbolizing fertility is of particular interest with its artistically and naturalistically deformed torso as an object of worship.

The Thracians of the Bessae tribe were carriers of the Bronze culture in the area of Assenovgrad. Samples of arms for defence and attack, a collection of marble votive tablets, etc. have come down to us from that epoch. A unique statuette of Thelesphorus, the health god, attracts the visitor with its enigmatic smile. The most significant vestiges of the Thracian material culture have survived from the time of the Roman conquest, when the ancient settlement of the territory of the present-day town had reached the zenith of its prosperity. A Thracian burial mound was unearthed from that time, with a four-wheel chariot and rich sepulchral accessories dated to the 1st c. A.D.

The Middle Ages are represented with archaeological finds from the excavations of Assen's Fortress and with copies of the murals in the Bachkovo Ossuary and Assen's Fortress.

The Ethnography Section features national costumes, ornaments, fabrics and objects of everyday life, which impress with their harmonious combination of colour, simplicity of form and exquisite craftsmanship. The exhibits are used for the arrangement of temporary displays of *martenitsi* (the red-and-white well-wishing charms worn in Bulgaria on March 1), *sourvachki* (the decorated cornel-tree twigs of the Bulgarian singers of Christmas carols), fabrics, knitwear, etc.

In the period of the National Revival the Bulgarian population created a rich spiritual and material culture and fought for an independent Bulgarian Church and education. A proof of that freedom-loving spirit of the local people are the photographs of Bako Dincho Kouzmov, founder of the Bulgarian community; Zhelyu Tyanev, an outlaw fighting against the Turks; Oton Ivanov and Sava Katrafilov, associates of Vassil Levski; Pavel Kostov and Father Matei Todorov, members of the Secret Revolutionary Committee.

On January 18, 1878 the victorious attack of the Russian troops led by General Viktor Deziderovich Dandevil and General Krasnov



From the Museum's display: the Thracian period

brought freedom from Ottoman domination. The unjust Berlin Treaty, however, provided for a new division of the Bulgarian lands and Assenovgrad remained within the domain of Eastern Roumelia. Led by the Secret Revolutionary Committee under Nikola Krustev and priest Angel Cholakov, a 2000-strong detachment of volunteers from the Assenovgrad region set off on September 6, 1885 for Plovdiv and took part in proclaiming the Unification of Bulgaria

Many photographs and documents illustrate the economic development and the political life in the locality after the Liberation in 1878. The increasing numbers of the proletariat among the masses and the intensified exploitation sowed the first seeds of the socialist ideas. Early in 1899 the Assenovgrad Communist Party organization was founded. Revolutionary spirit and political maturity were inherent to it since its very creation owing to the help rendered by D. Blagoev, G. Kirkov and V. Kolarov. The Communist Party headed the strikes, political actions and demonstrations of the working people. It organized the youth to set up a Leninist Youth Society (1919). In the years of fascist terror, 1923 and 1925, the Party gave a heavy toll of human lives. In 1927 groups of the Workers' Party and of the Young Communist League were formed in the town, which helped the working people still closer rally their ranks to resist fascism.

In the period of the armed struggle the local Party organization led

bravely the town proletariat and in August 1941 organized the first armed action in Bulgaria to free the detainees in the Gonda Voda and St Nikola concentration camps. The brothers Pantelei and Lazar Pachov were arrested in that action and on October 2, 1942 were hanged in Plovdiv Prison.

In May 1943 the *Vassil Levski* Partisan Group was organized in the Pavelski Mountains. Arms, documents, photographs and different artifacts illustrate the combat efforts of the group, which grew into the *Georgi Benkovski* Detachment and later on into the *V. Kolarov* Partisan Brigade.

Assenograd lost many of its beloved sons in the antifascist struggle: Kossyu Tafrov and Georgi Roussinov, Blagoi Tormanov and Lambri Ivanov, Sava Kulvachev, Nevena Yordanova, Ilia Mihailov, David Sassonov, the Mindev brothers.

The Museum exhibition ends with a photo of the great meeting on September 8, 1944 and the heart-felt welcome of the partisans in the town.

A Thracian helmet, 5th—4th cc. B.C.



A clay idol-symbol of fertility, 5th-6th cc. B.C.





Votive tablet with the Thracian horseman



ADDRESS: 24 Georgi Dimitrov Str.,
Telephone: 2-21-50; 2-41-98,
Open: 8—12 hrs, 14-17.30 hrs
Day off: Sunday

THE MUSEUM OF TRADITIONAL VITICULTURE AND WINE-MAKING IN THE ASSENOVGRAD REGION



The shed with the vats

This branch of the Town History Museum is housed in the Revival complex once owned by one of the biggest vintners of Stanimaka, Yakov Nikolov (the Roupetsa). The farm, vine-growing and wine-making facilities of Yakov the Roupetsa were known as the best ones in town. The grapes were taken to the house and were processed there. Yakov's brandies, wines and cognacs found a ready market all over the country.

The shed with the vats, the wine cellar, the premises for brandy-making, the utility building and the vintner's house are well preserved. The beautiful marble drinking fountain, the lawn with lovely flowers and the heavy iron-studded gates complete the excellent impression of the Revival complex.

The museum gives an idea of the methods of vine-growing, grapes-

processing and wine-making from olden times to this day. It makes the visitor familiar with viticulture as the major livelihood of the people in the Assenovgrad county at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th c. Of particular interest are the three vats on display, the only ones that have survived intact to our time in Bulgaria, as well as the votive tablets, the icon of St Trifon with a pruning knife, the viticulturist tools, the wide variety of vessels for processing and maturing of wine and brandy. The display is completed with some original panels by the local painter Kosta Forev on the subject of vine-growing and wine-making.



A Revival marble drinking fountain

The production of the Assenovgrad Wine-Making Works today is also shown, and also the successes of the working team and the awards that have been won.

ADDRESS: Kocho Kovachev residential district
6 Bulair Str.,
Telephone: 2-4030, 2-21-50,
Bus No 1.

THE ST NIKOLA CHURCH



The bishop's stall, wood carving

The church was built early in the 19th c in a spacious yard enclosed by stone walls.

The altar is separated from the church proper by an openwork wood-carved iconostasis with interesting motifs, made by wood-carvers from Tryavna. Particularly original is the bishop's stall from the year 1821. Its canopy is bordered with a two-headed dragon, a grape-laden vine trellis winding out of its jaws. A lion and a symbol of the sun are skilfully carved on the stall sides, embodying the merger of the Christian ideas with the pagan cult of the sun.

The belfry is set apart from the main building. A chapel to SS Trifon and Simeon stands in the yard, with a basement formerly used as an ossuary. The interior walls of the chapel were painted with murals in 1862. The chapel houses some valuable 19th c. icons. The most interesting of them is the one of St Trifon with a pruning knife, who



The lion, a detail of the bishop's stall

was considered the patron saint of vine-growing and wine-making. The St Nikola Church in which service is regularly held has been declared a monument of culture.

The holy gates of the iconostasis



ADDRESS: Kocho Kovachev Residential District
1 Sheinovo Str.,
Telephone: 2-72-86

THE HOLY ARCHANGEL

(now Hadji Dimiter)



The Hadji Dimiter School

A symmetric, one-storey building erected in 1883, with six classrooms, a spacious hall and a basement. The school is situated on a natural height. It is original in architecture, with facades broken by wall piers. The building is still used for educational purposes.

Part of the medieval fortifications (12th c.) at the foot of the school building has been restored. The wall protecting the settlement of Stanimaka connected two natural heights on which the St John the Precursor Church and the school were built.

ADDRESS: 28 Kocho Kovachev Str.,
Telephone: 2-27-43

THE ST JOHN THE PRECURSOR CHURCH



It is known to the people as St Ian's Church and is situated in the western part of the town on a high rock, close to the restored medieval fortress walls. The building was erected circa the 13th and the 14th c., while the murals were painted at a later period. Archaeologists maintain that the church was part of the fortifications which protected the old settlement.

This one-nave, one-apse church, without narthex but with a preapse room, has no access from the north and northwest. As the roof was rebuilt it is difficult for the architects to tell with certainty whether the church had a dome or not.

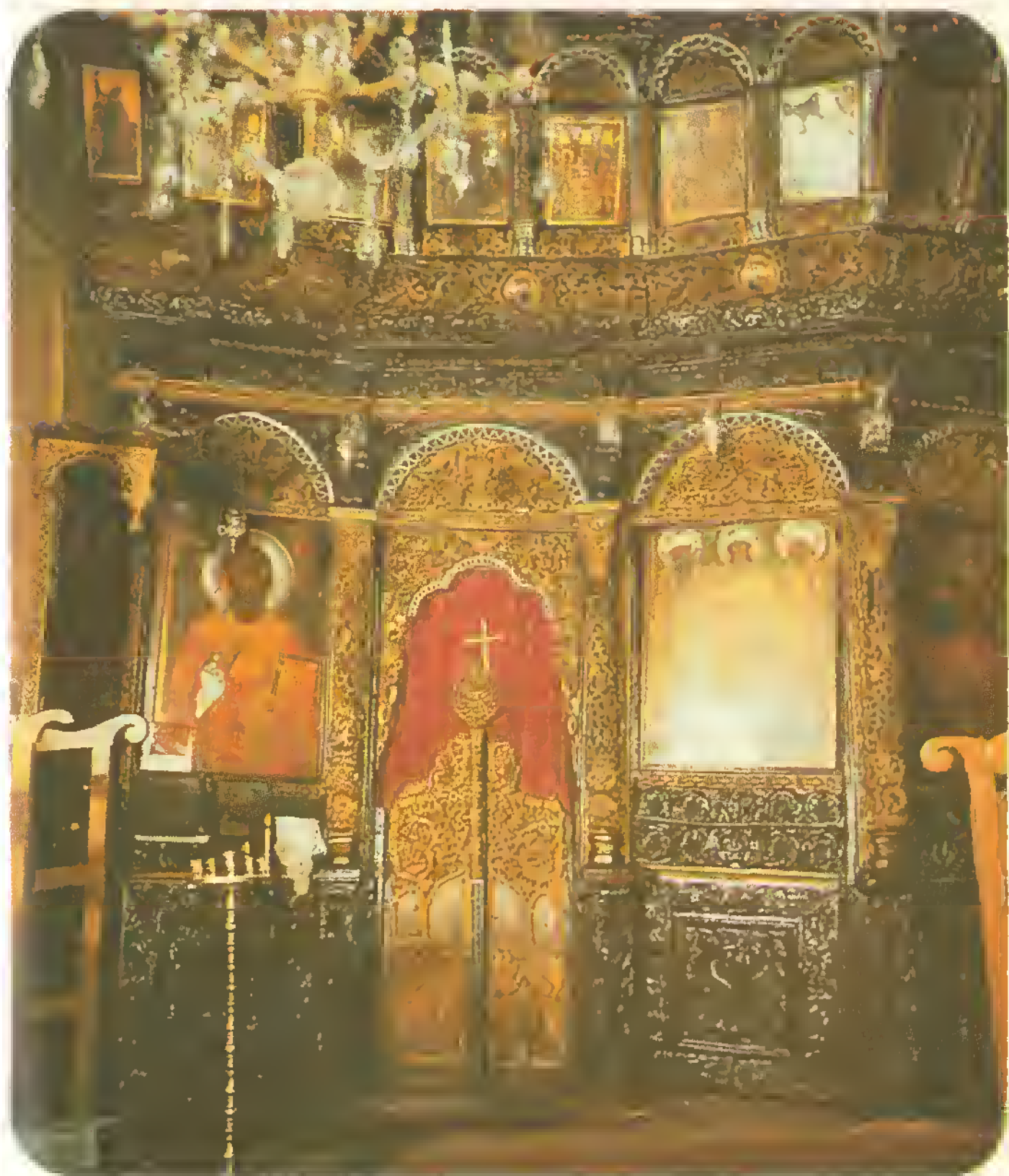
Architecturally it resembles the Our Lady of Petrich Church near Assen's Fortress and the Ossuary in Bachkovo Monastery. In order to level the terrain on which the church stands, supporting walls and carrier vaults were laid out of stone, travertine and brick. From the outside the impression is of a two-storey building. It is made of crushed and semihewn stone on white plaster, alternating with layers of brick. The walls are one meter thick. Together with the apse, they are divided from the outside with two-step niches.

The St John the Precursor Church is a cultural monument of national importance.



ADDRESS: Rilska Str.,
Telephone: 2-21-50
Bus No 2.

THE DORMITION OF THE VIRGIN CHURCH



The iconostasis

This church stands on the ruins of a medieval temple destroyed back in 1657 by the Turks. It was rebuilt in 1765 by the master builders Dimo Georgiev and his son Georgi Dimov from the region of Kostour. To avoid irking the Turkish authorities, they built the church into the ground. From the outside the building looked very modest, while its interior was spacious and richly decorated. That is why the people also called it the Holy Virgin of the Deep.

Initially the church had only an altar and a naos. By 1860 the women's section and the narthex were added. The Turkish authorities did not allow the erection of belfries. In 1873 the SS Peter and Paul Chapel was built nearby and in 1877 master builders

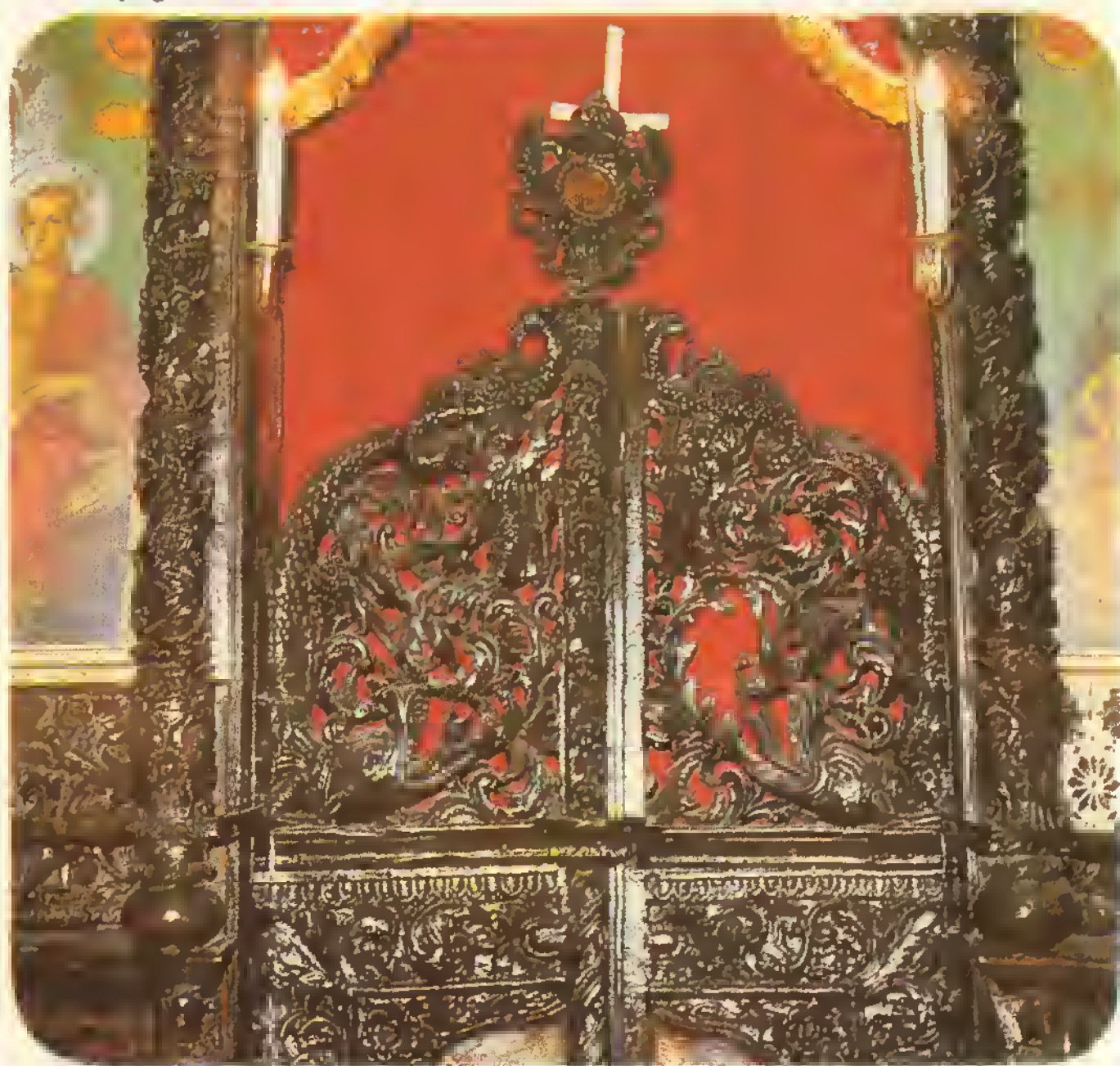
Angel Dragov and Petko Dimitrov of Bratsigovo added a belfry to the chapel. The belfry is decorated with religious motifs and scenes from the outside. It has a Viennese bronze bell and a big clock.

The church building has three naves and an apse. Its stone walls are one-meter thick. Two rows of four columns each divide the naos into three naves, the central one twice larger than the rest. The floor is covered with marble slabs.

The church houses icons of the 18th and the 19th c., valuable works of local and other master painters. The highlight of The Dormition of the Virgin Church, however, is the carved walnut iconostasis on which the wood-carvers Kosta Kotsi and Kosta Masiko from Metsovo worked for ten solid years. They left an inscription on the holy gates that their work was completed on October 10, 1821.

The iconostasis is adorned with vine trellises, eagles and gryphons, lions, pelicans, amber grapes and flowers, religious scenes and whole compositions from the Old Testament. This exquisite workmanship shows that the wood-carvers Kosta Kotsi and Kosta Masiko were imperceptibly influenced by the rich artistic heritage of their forerfathers. The strivings for national liberation had also found place in their work. The masters lent new meaning to the old symbols and images, they took them out of the religious context and filled them with new content. The image of the lion, a symbol of the Christ's justice opposed to injustice and sin, proved particularly suitable for their purpose. On such a place of utmost prominence as the holy gates the two wood-carvers from Metsovo depicted a lion with a sceptre raised high in its front paws, thus manifesting the wish of the people to reinstate an independent state of their own. In

The holy gates of the iconostasis





Detail of the wood-carved iconostasis

the centre of another composition the lion holds an axe with which it is cutting down a coffin. The people still interpret this composition not in a religious, but in a national, patriotic spirit. The lion is assumed to personify the Bulgarian people breaking down the tomb in which it was buried for five centuries, so as to rise for an independent political, public and cultural life.

The bishop's stall is another wonderful masterpiece of wood carving. The church in which service is regularly held has been declared a monument of culture.



ADDRESS: Kocho Kovachev Residential
District,
32 Dicho Petrov str.,
Telephone.: 2-78-03,
Bus No. 2.

THE CONVENT OF BACHKOVO MONASTERY



The convent with the St. George of the Cloister Church

The Convent is a monument from the Revival Period built on foundations from the 11th c. and situated in the highest part of the ancient Convent district (now K. Kovachev residential district). The medieval road to Bachkovo Monastery and Assen's Fortress ran there. The place was mentioned for the first time in Georgiy Bakuriani's Statute as an inn intended to shelter and feed the pilgrims to the monastery. This was its destination in the course of nine centuries.

The medieval inn is a complex of buildings, enclosed by high massive walls with flying buttresses, which cover an area of about 0.8 hectares. It was economically self-sufficient. In the 16th—17th cc. the buildings were razed to the ground and the property looted.

In the 18th c. the Convent of Bachkovo Monastery was built on the old foundations with a period architecture. The main building is a

typical monastery structure, with living and administrative premises, a wine cellar, storerooms and a granary. Owing to the inclined terrain, the structure rises three-storey high to the northwest, where it faces the town, and one-storey high to the southwest, where it faces the yard.

The upper floor contains a spacious, richly painted hall encircled with rooms. The interior of the hall is completed with a dias and two graceful wooden columns connected with an arch.

The household premises are situated around the cobblestone paved yard: a kitchen, a washing room, storerooms and stables.

The St George of the Cloister Church is part of this fine architectural ensemble, with the inbuilt St. Ekaterina temple from the time of the first inn (12th—14th cc.).

The St George of the Cloister Church is a three-nave, one-apse building, with an emporia (balcony) and without a narthex. It is 16,5 m long and 12.5 m wide. Two rows of four columns each divide the three naves. The columns are made of wood and are topped by artistically executed capitals. The exquisite wood-carved iconostasis is dated to 1770 and the majority of icons belong to the 17th—18th cc. period. The exterior side of the northeastern wall is covered with paintings by Zahari Zograf (1841).

The church was intended to cater for the inmates of the inn and the inhabitants of a settlement which gradually grew around it.

On the occasion of the 1300th anniversary of the Bulgarian State the Holy Synod donated the Convent buildings to the Municipal People's Council of Assenovgrad. The donor's wish is to have the Town History Museum transferred there after the restoration of the buildings.



ADDRESS: 40 Rodopska Str.,
Bus No 2 to the Dormition
of the Virgin Church.

A REVIVAL PERIOD HOUSE (NOW THE TEACHERS' CLUB)



This three-storey massive building was constructed in the second half of the 19th c. by master builders from the Rhodopean village of Yugovo, Smolyan country. Its exterior is apparently influenced by the Plovdiv and by the Rhodopean houses. The facade is broken out with bay windows supported by wooden consoles. The rooms are on different levels, with ingenious communication between them. There is a beautiful balcony on the top floor in the northwestern part of the building. The cellar was used to keep home-made wine and winter preserves.

The doors, wall cupboards and ceilings are wood-carved. Geometric and floral motifs are skilfully intertwined on them, sunflowers, bouquets of flowers, leaves and roses delighted the eye.

The cobbled yard with box-shrubbery, flowers, vine trellises and fig-trees, the ancient marble drinking fountain and the heavy oak gates complete the excellent impression of this remarkable Revival house. After the restoration it became a Teachers' Club.



ADDRESS: Kocho Kovachev Residential
District,
13 Kiril i Metodi Str.,
Tel. 2-81-36,
Bus No 1.

THE HOUSE WITH OLYMPIC SCENES



A one-storey house, with a large wine cellar and a big hall encircled with rooms. The ceiling of the hall is painted with scenes from the Olympic Games. The house has also a stone-laid fireplace, richly decorated in relief. The original marble drinking fountain in the yard bears inscriptions and its bronze spouts are shaped like snake heads.

ADDRESS: Kocho Kovachev Residential
District,
2 Bachkovska Str.,
Buses Nos 1 and 2.

THE HOUSE WITH THE SUN



The Sun, a wood-carved ceiling

This two-storey house with a high basement floor, a deep wine cellar and a wide yard was built by master builders from Bratsigovo in the middle of the 19th c.

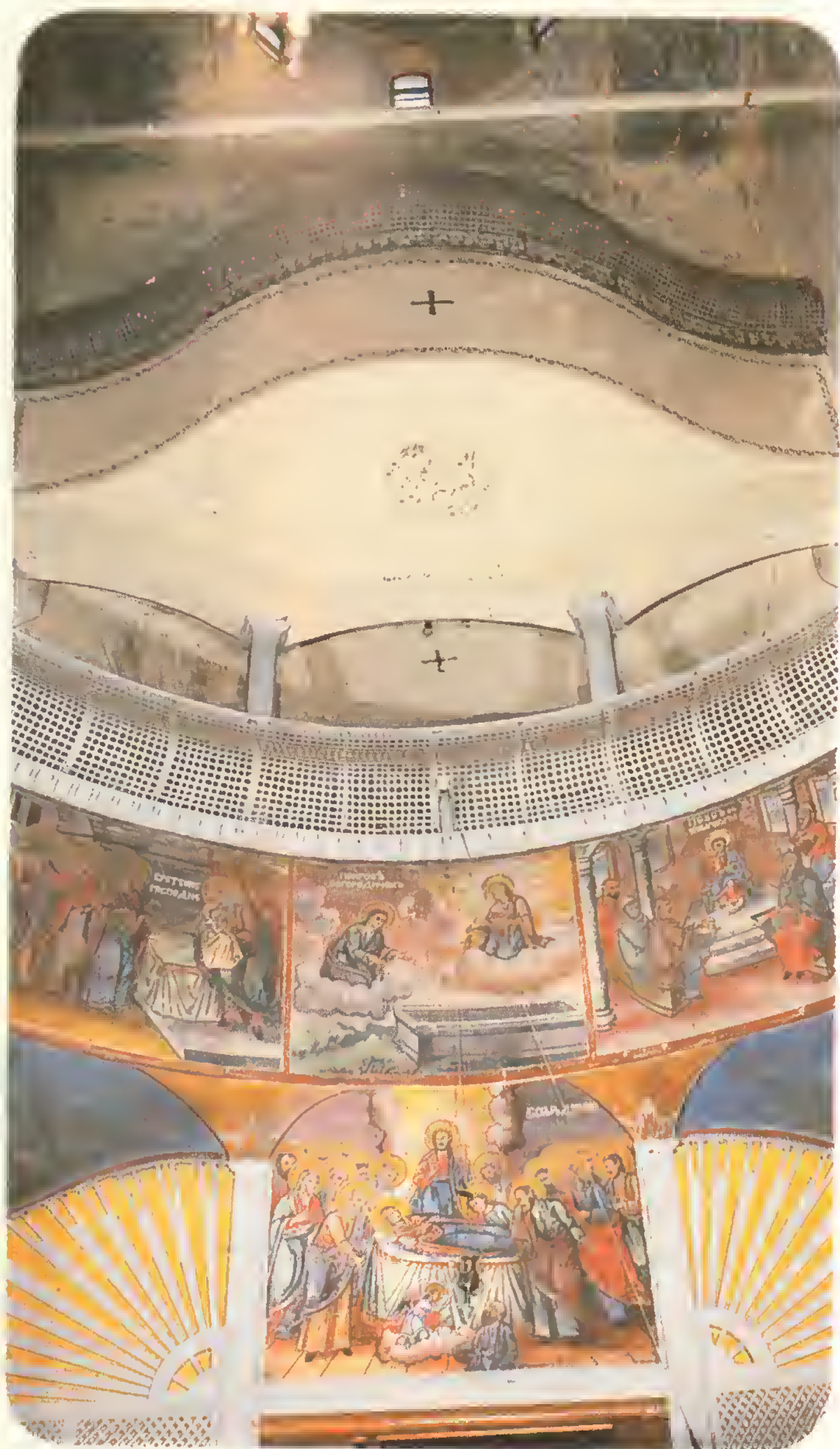
In architecture and decoration it is close to the Plovdiv Revival houses. The facade still bears the original wall paintings. The portico is supported by two round columns. A double staircase leads to the first floor and a second beautiful wooden staircase with an elegantly arching ceiling makes way to the second floor, which overhangs the first oriel-like.

The rooms are large, with richly decorated niches and woodcarved doors, wall-cupboards and ceilings.

Now an ethnographic exhibition is arranged in the building which has been restored to be a museum. This exhibition will give an idea of town life in Assenovgrad at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th c.

ADDRESS: Kocho Kovachev
Residentail District,
32 Raicho Pozharliev Str.,
Telephone: 2-21-50

THE ST GEORGE CHURCH



One of the most impressive Revival Period churches, it was built in 1848 by master masons from the Rhodopean village of Yugovo under the supervision of chief mason Vassil Dimov. The murals were done by the icon-painter Nikola of Edirne.

The building has three naves and an apse. Two rows of six columns each, with beautiful capitals, support two balconies, one above the other, and render majestic beauty to the interior. The church has an open narthex on the outside, with round and square columns.

Of the three domes, the central one is the biggest. Its dodecahedral drum rises above the roof and is in harmony with the steep slopes of the mountain.

High stone walls with interesting gates to the west, north and south encircle the temple. There is a stone drinking fountain with inscriptions in the yard and also living premises. The belfry with an ancient clock rises high above the beautiful Revival Period ensemble.

The interesting architecture of the complex, the original paintings, the old icons and the wooden iconostasis are all made by Bulgarian builders and artists.

This monument of culture is an acting church.

The SS Kozma and Damyan Chapel is in close proximity to the church. It is the only survivor of the Convent of Hilendar Monastery, where the patriarch of the Bulgarian National Revival, Paissiy of Hilendar, was supposed to have died.



ADDRESS: The Pachov Brothers Residential
 District,
 18 Vela Peeva Str.,
 Telephone: 2-91-64.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE VIRGIN CHURCH



The entrance of the church with the belfry

It was built in 1836 on the foundations of an older church and in 1838 was painted by Zahari Zograf. These are the first wall paintings in the Assenovgrad area.

The church is a three-nave, one-dome building of modest architecture. For a long time it was in the possession of Bachkovo Monastery.

Of the old church built in the 12th—13th cc. only part of the apse is preserved, with two blind two-step niches. A beautiful cornice of brick and travertine runs outside above the apse wall.

The St John the Baptist Chapel is adjacent to the western wall of the church, with an ayazmo (a curative spring). A grave-stone column with the relief of a gladiator and with inscription in Old Greek serves as a support to the communion table. The walls are richly painted. The chapel houses a big old icon of SS Cyril and Methodius. They are depicted on it in bishop vestments, with



The Our Lady (of the Fish) Church

crowns on their heads and holding a scroll with the Slav-Bulgarian alphabet and the Gospels in Slav-Bulgarian language.

The belfry, decorated with paintings, towers beautifully above one of the entrances into the church yard. The church is also known among the people as Our Lady of the Fish, owing to the relief of a fish in the curative spring.

This is an acting church declared a monument of culture.

ADDRESS: The Pachov Brothers Residential
District, 26 Yanko Hadjiev Str.,
Telephone: 2-75-51,
Bus No 1.

THE ST DIMITER CHURCH



The church was built in 1866. The Phanariots of the town were hampering its construction by destroying at night what had been built in daytime.

The building has three naves, one apse, a dome, a narthex and a belfry. The dome bears the inscription: "The first Bulgarian church". The religious service there was held in Bulgarian. One of the priests, Matei Todorov, was member of the Secret Revolutionary Committee and during the April 1876 Uprising was cruelly tortured in Plovdiv Prison.



The church houses many original old icons; in the iconostasis are those of Christ, the Holy Virgin, St Dimiter, St Clement of Ohrid, Boris I Tsar of Bulgaria, etc., and in the narthex that of SS Cyril and Methodius holding a scroll with the Slav-Bulgarian alphabet and the Gospels translated into Slavonic.

A two-storey building in the churchyard housed a Bulgarian school. In 1872 one of the rooms was used as a *chitalishte* (a library club), founded by Oton Ivanov, follower of Vassil Levski and member of the Secret Committee's police.

Again in the churchyard is the tomb of Ensign Grigoriy Vassilievich Vishnyakov, who died in the liberating Russo-Turkish War in a

fight with Sainclair's gangs near the village of Dobrostan on May 11, 1878.

The church is acting and has been declared a monument of culture.



ADDRESS: 4 Savva Kulvachev Str.,
(Behind the town Library)
Telephone: 2-80-05.

THE HOLY TRINITY CHURCH



It was built in the 1857—1862 period by master builders from Yugovo, who erected the St George Church. The money and material for the construction were donated by the population.

This is a three-nave, three-dome, one-apse church. The naves, covered with semicylindrical vaults, are divided by two rows of six stone columns each. The drums of the domes lie on pendentives. The central dome is the biggest. The belfry was added in 1936.

The wall paintings were done in 1866 as testified by an inscription on the central dome. Icons of high artistic value have been preserv-

ed made by the icon-painter Georgi Ksafov from Assenovgrad.

During the period of the Bulgarian National Revival the church witnessed bitter struggle for domination and confrontation between the Phanariots and the Bulgarian population of the town. The first Bulgarian school was accommodated in a small frame -built structure in the churchyard. The patriotic-minded teacher Nesho Braikov, graduate of the Plovdiv Secondary School, replaced there the slates and slate pencils with notebooks, and the monastery school classes with lessons in history, geography, arithmetic and natural history.



St Trifon, icon



Holy Trinity, icon

The church is acting and has been declared a monument of culture.

ADDRESS: 3 G. S. Rakovski str.,
(Behind the post office)
Telephone: 2-27-04.

THE ST ATANAS CHURCH



It was built in 1834 to cater for the poor from the Chiprihor district. The materials and money necessary for the construction were donated.

This modest, low church, dug three to four steps into the ground roofed with stone slates and having a frame-built glass dome differs from all other churches in Assenovgrad. The belfry, close to the western wall entrance, was also a rickety, nail-studded structure. The yard is enclosed by a massive 3 m high and 80 cm thick wall.

In the 1918—1925 period the church was reconstructed and its extension with the newly-built apses rendered it cruciform, while the laid-out walls, the new roof and the massive belfry changed entirely its architecture. The wall paintings were done by Georgi Ksafov, a local painter, and by an unknown Russian painter.

The struggle for domination over the Phanariots in this church continued even after the Liberation and was led by Father Matei Todorov.

The church is acting and has been declared a monument of culture.



ADDRESS: 1 Alexander Stamboliiski Str.,
Telephone: 2-40-15,
Busses Nos 1, 2 and 3.

THE KARAALANOV SCHOOL

It is also a cultural monument of Assenovgrad symbolizing the struggle against the Greek influence and the Phanariotic oppression. The building was erected on donations by Georgi Tyanev Karaalanov, a great patriot, and was used as a school.

In 1881 the first secondary school in the town, a big two-storey building, with 8 classrooms, welcomed the young students. On the following year their number reached 151. With the efforts of the schooldirectors Konstantin Baltov and Stoyu Shishkov, and the progressive teachers, the majority of whom took part in the Unification of Bulgaria, the school became a veritable centre of education and patriotism.

In 1888, under a decree of the Fifth Regular National Assembly, it was named the Three-Class State Boys School and occupied the building until 1906. Later on the place was used to accommodate a girls' and a vocational school successively.



ADDRESS: 68 G. Dimitrov Str.,
Busses Nos 1, 2 and 3.

A PALEONTOLOGICAL EXHIBITION



The paleontology display in the Lenin Unified Secondary Polytechnical School

It comprises several thousand bones of vertebrates which had lived 7—8 million years ago. These unique exhibits are useful in solving some paleontological problems concerning the Pliocene and the Miocene on the territory of Bulgaria.

ADDRESS: The Lenin Unified Secondary
Polytechnical school,
7 Zahari Stoyanov Str.,
Telephone: 2-22-50, 2-76-00,
Busses Nos 1, 2 and 3.

●

The Museum in the Izbegli Village

● ●

The Museum in Topolovo Village

● ● ●

The Museum in the Village of Cherven



Part of the museum display in the village of Topolovo

●

The display traces the educational and national-liberation movement during the period of the National Revival, and the participation of the peasants of Izbegli in the proclamation of the Unification of Bulgaria in 1885. The activity of the local Party organization in the armed antifascist struggle is amply illustrated with documentary material, photographs and various artifacts.

In the 1943—1944 period the village became a base of the V. Kolarov Partisan Brigade. The brigade's staff organized there an underground printing office. There were many partisan supporters, helpers and political prisoners from this village, while those who joined the partisan movement numbered 36.

On display are interesting exhibits on the collectivization while the

ethnography section gives a good idea of the life and livelihood of the people in this region.

ADDRESS: The Chitalishte,
 Telephone: 93-324-236,
 Bus service every 90 min.



This general historical display is arranged in the restored house of the partisan helpers old Vana and old Katerina.

It is a one-storey building, with a basement and a big yard. One of the rooms houses an ethnography exhibition, while the historical one is arranged in the corridor and the other room.

The collection shows the history of the village during the National Revival and up to our time. It traces the economic, political and cultural life, as well as the work of the Party organization there. A place of prominence is given to old Vana Tatarovka, who made of her house a refuge for the partisan fighters, while her children Georgi and Nadya fought with the V. Kolarov Partisan Brigade.

ADDRESS: The house is at the end of the village.
 The guide is in the Chitalishte building.
 Telephone: 93-321-25-65,
 Bus service from Assenovgrad every hour.



The greatest importance in this general historical display is assigned to the activities of the local Party organization, to the participation of the population in the 1923 September Antifascist Uprising and in the antifascist struggle in the 1941—1944 period. The display also features a collection of coins and folk costumes.

ADDRESS: The Chitalishte Building
 Telephone: 93-325-235,
 Bus service every hour.



MUSEUM DISPLAYS, HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS: FORTRESSES AND MONASTERIES

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Museum display
in the village of Izbegli | 5. Bachkovo Monastery |
| 2. Museum display
in the village of Topolov | 6. The St Kirik Monastery |
| 3. Museum display
in the village of Cherven | 7. The St. Petka Monastery |
| 4. Assen's Fortress | 8. The St Nedelya Monastery |

ASSEN'S FORTRESS



The Our Lady of Petrich Church

The medieval Assen's Fortress covers an area of about 1.5 hectares on a rocky peak on the left bank of Assenitsa River. The fortress is accessible only from the southwest. The first written data on these fortifications were found in the Statute of Bachkovo Monastery, which says that the Petrich Fortress, "a place strong and fortified", together with the adjacent lands was given out as a gift to the Monastery by Georgiy Bakuriani.

According to the archaeological excavations, the fortress was built in the 9th c. by the Byzantines to guard the approaches to the Aegean. The fortification walls are in places up to 10—15 m high. The outer wall is higher and thicker, and encircles the southern part of the fortress, where the mountain slope is not so steep and is more accessible.

The inner wall encircles the strongest fortified central part of the fortress. Some important buildings are situated there: the castle of the feudal lord, the family church and two water reservoirs adjusted to collect water from the roofs of the adjacent buildings. The foundations of ten more premises were excavated. The relief of the terrain and the limited space required rational use of almost every inch of land. Narrow and steep streets and paths ran from building to building.

The premises for the soldiers who guarded the fortress are situated between the two fortress walls. Thirty such premises have been unearthed so far, but apparently their number is much greater. Only the central battlements and the churchyard have been thoroughly excavated. The archaeological digs continue.

This well fortified stronghold for the first time passed into the hands of the Bulgarian rulers in 1206 under Tsar Kaloyan. Under Tsar Ivan Assen II it gained particular magnificence and power. After the victory at Klokotnitsa the tsar strengthened and further extended the fortification walls, erected new buildings, rebuilt the church. This large-scale construction work was commemorated with an eight-line inscription in Bulgarian, hewn into the rocks at the entrance in 1231.

“In the year 6739 Indiction 4, Ivan Assen, by God’s will Tsar of the Bulgarians, the Greeks and also of other peoples, installed Alexi Sevast here in power and erected this fortress.”

This valuable written evidence to the glory of the Bulgarian State is one of the three inscriptions in stone left by Ivan Assen II, which were the reason to name the fortress in 1900 Assen’s Fortress and in 1934 to give the town the name of Assenovgrad.

The fortress fell into Byzantine hands under the heirs of Ivan Assen II, but in 1344 under Tsar Ivan Alexander the Bulgarians regained it. After Bulgaria’s fall under Ottoman domination the fortress lost its strategic position as a frontier stronghold.

The fortress church Our Lady of Petrich, an exquisite architectural monument of the 12th—13th cc. which has been preserved to our time, is built on the most prominent place. It is cross-domed, with sloping rafters, a tripartite altar and a wide narthex, and belongs to the type of two-storey mausoleum churches. The richly painted upper floor is crowned with a dodecahedral domed drum. A square belfry rises above the narthex — a new element in church architecture typical of the Turnovo school. This gave ground to speculations that, if not the entire church, at least the belfry above the narthex was erected during the reconstruction under Tsar Ivan Assen II.

The facade is broken up plastically and decorated with blind two-step niches and an arched motif, which ends above the roof cornice in a triangular frontone. The plastic decoration resembles the ornamentation of churches in Veliko Turnovo and Nessebur.

With its colourful building material and ingenious space planning the two-storey Our Lady of Petrich Church in Assen’s Fortress is a



Fragment of the church

most remarkable monument of medieval architecture on the Bulgarian lands.

The fortress is situated 3 km to the south of the town. It can be reached along the panoramic asphalt road. There is a guide to the exhibition and a pavilion for souvenirs.

The family church in the feudal castle, 11th—12th cc.





Fortress walls



The Guide Is Available From: 8—12 hrs, and 13—17 hrs.,
CLOSED ON: Wednesday and Thursday,
Information: telephone 2-21-50 (in the museum).
Paid guided tours.

BACHKOVO MONASTERY



Bachkovo Monastery, the Dormition of the Virgin, is a most monumental and impressive sample of Bulgarian architecture and art. It is situated 11 km off Assenovgrad, in the Northern Central Rhodopes. For nine centuries now the Monastery has stood as majestic medieval castle amidst the beautiful valley of Assenitsa River, encircled by the sharp ridges of rocky peaks. It was founded in 1083 with the funds and at the request of the Georgian Grigoriy Bakuriani, a high-ranking Byzantine official, commander of the troops in the Western Domain of the Byzantine Empire. From the Monastery's Statute by which Grigoriy settled the questions of property, regulations and management of the Monastery, one can see that its estates stretched from the Thracian Lowlands up to Salonika.

There is not much information of the existence of the Monastery in the Middle Ages. The Bulgarian lands surrounding it were alternately within the territory of the Bulgarian State, or of Byzantium, or in the hands of the Latin knights who came with the Fourth Crusade.

In 1206 Tsar Kaloyan conquered the Rhodopes and took possession of the estates of Bachkovo Monastery. Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331—1371) consolidated the rule over the Rhodopes. That Bulgarian ruler donated generously to this spiritual and literary centre. His image is painted in the narthex on the upper floor of the Ossuary next to the images of the first donors, the Bakuriani brothers.

After the fall of Veliko Turnovo the Bulgarian Patriarch Euthymius was exiled in the Monastery. He continued his enlightening scholar-



The refectory with murals by Alexi Atanasov

ly activity there and, according to Constantine Kostenechki, spent the last days of his life there.

During Ottoman domination, despite the difficulties caused by religious fanaticism, the Monastery retained its role of a Bulgarian religious and cultural centre. Early in the 16th c. it shared the lot of hundreds of other Bulgarian monasteries and churches and was burned to the ground. Only the Ossuary and the Holy Archangels Church withstood the vicissitudes of time and destruction.

The Ossuary is a two-storey tomb-church situated at approximately 300 m southeast of the Monastery. It is richly painted by Ioan Iveropoulets (11th—12th cc.), apparently a painter of Georgian extraction. Time and human neglect have considerably damaged the murals, but even what has remained and come down to us stirs admiration with its monumentality of style, realism, expressiveness of the faces, well-balanced compositions and strict proportions. The archangels from the apse on the upper floor, the scene of the holy

communion, the image of the Virgin, are among the most perfect creations of medieval pictorial art. The portraits of the donors (12th c.) and that of Ivan Alexander (14th c.) belong to a later period.

After a century of desolation, the buildings of the monastery complex gradually came to life early in the 17th c. until it finally became such as we know it now. Huge iron-studded gates lead to the wide yard, encircled on all sides with two-storey living premises, with typical wooden balconies. In the middle of the yard are the two monastery churches, the Dormition of the Virgin and The Holy Archangels. A special passage takes the visitors to the southern yard, also encircled by two-storey living premises. The church St Nikola stands there.

The great monastery Refectory is the earliest-built structure in the complex. It was erected in 1601. In 1643 the walls of the vaulted hall were decorated with murals by an unknown artist, reflecting the latest trends in church painting of that time. Thus the refectory became a rich art gallery, the only one of its kind in the Bulgarian lands. Its paintings were executed with virtuosity and treated subjects and themes typical for the time: *Last Judgement, Isaiah's Tree with the Ancient Kings and Philosophers, The Acahistus to the Virgin Mary, The Ecumenical Councils* — all remarkable 17th c. works of art.

In the second half of the 19th c. the local artist Alexi Atanassov painted the outer northern wall of the refectory. His composition *The Carrying of the Wonder-Working Icon* is a brilliant work of art in scale, idea and artistic execution. It depicts men, women and children in typical folk costumes of the Assenovgrad area.

The Dormition of the Virgin Cathedral Church was built in 1604. It is a spacious three-nave building, with a large dome and a broad narthex. Its interior wall paintings were done in 1643. Murals of that period have been preserved only in the narthex. The portraits of the donors, Georgi and his son Konstantin, are the most impressive ones. They were painted at the donors' request and with their funds on the eastern wall of the narthex, standing, in regal boyar clothes.

The iconostasis of The Dormition of the Virgin Church is dated circa the 16th and the 17th c. and is a veritable masterpiece of wood carving in Bulgaria. The church also houses a wonder-working icon — the icon of the Virgin Mary of the 14th c., silverbound, with inscriptions in Georgian. Legends are told about this icon.

The oldest place of worship, the Holy Archangels Church, stands close to the main monastery church. This is a two-storey one-dome building, with colonades and a vault painted richly by Zahari Zograf on the ground floor.

Early in the 18th c. Bachkovo Monastery played once again an important role in the spiritual and literary life of the country. According to the writings of the French traveller, Paul Loucas who had visited the Monastery in 1706, it provided shelter to more than 100 monks who zealously guarded the rich library and the valuable old manuscripts of this religious domain.



A wall painting by Zahari Zograf in the narthex of the St Nikola Church



A communion theological gospel book, print
Venetian monstrance made in 1637, a copy of the St Marc Cathedral,
Venice





Bachkovo Monastery, general view



During the Bulgarian National Revival the Monastery was extended. In 1838 the construction of the St. Nikola Church was completed. It was painted by Zahari Zograf in 1840 at the order of the Father Superior and his deputy. On the western wall of the open narthex the Zograf painted *Last Judgement*. Among the sinners he portrayed some of the local landlords and their wives, who opposed the opening of a Bulgarian school. In the left upper corner of the same composition, along with the portraits of the donors, the painter left his own selfportrait.

The museum of the Monastery possesses a collection of some interesting relics connected with the history of Bachkovo Monastery: incunabula with artistically wrought bindings, dated circa 16th—18th cc., a copper engraving stamp from 1807, old icons of the 15th—18th cc., monstrances, church vessels, etc., all made by Bulgarian gold- and coppersmiths, wood-carvers and icon-painters from different parts of the country.

The Monastery yard with the marble drinking fountains, ginger trees, Chinese pines and paradise apples add a great deal to the charm of the whole complex.

Having survived through the centuries and preserved for us historical events, paintings and architecture of several epochs, Bachkovo Monastery is now one of the most interesting cultural monuments of national significance.



The Guide is available
Every Day from 8—12 hrs, and 13—17 hrs,
Telephone: 93-327-277,
Along the Motorway to the town of Smolyan
Bus service from Assenovgrad every 90 min.

THE ST KIRIL MONASTERY



St Paraskeva monastery church

This monastery is situated on the northern slopes of the Rhodopes, 3km to the southwest from Assenovgrad, close to the Gorni Voden residential district. For this reason it is also known as Gorni Voden Monastery and it commands a beautiful view to the Marichina Valley, Sredna Gora Mountains and the Balkan Range.

The Monastery was built during the reign of Tsar Ivan Assen II, which is commemorated by an inscription in Bulgarian made in 1321 on a stone slab. The first buildings were erected on the slope, where there is a curative spring now. Later on the St. Paraskeva Church, living premises and utility buildings were built on the big lawn in front of the curative spring.

Until the end of the 17th c., when Bulgaria was still under Ottoman domination, the Bulgarian spirit and letters prevailed in the Monastery which is corroborated by the inscription in Bulgarian on a marble slab made in 1696. Pilgrims from the Thracian Lowlands



The Doomsday, wall painting by Alexi Atanassov

and the Rhodopes came there. The religious service was held in Bulgarian, valuable books were preserved, scribes rewrote new ones.

In spite of the strong Greek influence in the 18th c., the St Kirik Monastery attracted the Bulgarian people from the surrounding lands. Masters of the tailoring, homespun-weaving and broadcloth-making trades donated generously to it.

In 1810 the *kurdjali* went rampart on the northern slopes of the Rhodopes and burned the Monastery down. The population from the region helped with voluntary labour and donations to rebuild it. In 1835 the St Paraskeva Church was rebuilt, and so were the living premises and the utility buildings surrounding it, while in 1860 the buildings near the curative spring were restored.

The St Paraskeva Church situated in the middle of the Monastery yard is cross-domed, with octagonal dome drums and rectangular windows letting in ample light. A typical element of the architecture of this church, which distinguishes it from the churches of the other monasteries in the vicinity are the three septagonal apses located in the eastern, northern and southern part of the church. The masonry is of marble blocks and the roof is made of hewn slates.

The wall paintings — a true masterpiece — in the narthex, in the interior of the church and in the altar, are made by different masters. Very impressive are the works of the local painter Alexi Atanassov. The money for the murals were donated by Bulgarians from Plovdiv, from Mouldava, from Gorni Voden and other villages, which is mentioned in the inscriptions left on the walls.

Most of the murals treat national patriotic subjects. In *The Infidel-Torturers* composition curved sabres are raised above the heads of horrified mothers and helpless children, reminding of the atrocities committed by the Ottoman Turks; *The Last Supper* shows a typical Bulgarian meal with wooden spoons and bowls, with copper pots; Cain and Abel are depicted as peasants from the vicinity. Cain ploughs with a wooden plough drawn by two oxen, while Abel tends a flock of sheep. *The Virgin Celestial* is a synthesized image of the Bulgarian woman: beautiful, radiant, with a kerchief on her head dressed in a white shirt with embroidered front.

Most of the icons are from the 19th c. and are veritable masterpieces of icon-painting. Six of them were done by Zahari Zograf.

The walnut iconostasis is dated to the 19th c. On the altar canopy, which is a very typical example of 19th c. wood carving, the skilful hands of the masters have attained an exquisite composition of floral motifs, birds, grapes and other fruit.

With its interesting architecture, with the wealth of its wallpaintings and wood carvings the St Paraskeva Church of the St Kirik Monastery is a remarkable monument of culture.

The history of the Monastery is connected with the revolutionary past of Bulgaria. Outings were organized there by the Young Communist League and the Bulgarian Communist Party. In 1933 the proletariat of Assenovgrad celebrated the May Day on the big lawn.

In the 1943—1944 period the St Kirik Monastery was turned into a concentration camp and many activists of the workers' revolutionary movement in Bulgaria, as well as Soviet prisoners of war were exiled there.

Wood-carved canopy in the altar





The Last Supper, wall painting
by Alexi Atanasov



The parable of Cain and Abel,
wall painting by Alexi
Atanasov

Today the monastery complex, restored by the Research Institute for Monuments of Culture in Sofia, is an international creative centre of the Bulgarian Architects' Union, a wonderful place for recreation, rest and creative work.



There is an asphalt road to the Monastery
via the Gorni Voden Residential District,
Telephones: 2-73-02, 2-62-92,
Bus service to Gorni Voden every hour.

MOULDAVA MONASTERY



The St Petka of Mouldava Monastery is situated in a beautiful wooded locality on the northern slopes of the Rhodopes, 4 km eastwards from Assenovgrad. Steep, winding paths lead to its gates.

It was founded circa 1360, during the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander — a generous donor of the monasteries and churches in the country of Assenovgrad.

During the years of Ottoman domination Mouldava Monastery was destroyed three times and three times restored by patriotic-minded Bulgarians. It was burned down for the first time in 1657, when during the campaign of forcible conversion of the Rhodopean population into Muslim faith the Ottoman Turks put to fire 218 churches and 33 monasteries from Kostenets to Stanimaka.

Particularly destructive were the raids of the *kurdjali*, who in 1793 reduced the Monastery to ashes. Three decades later, in 1812,

Mouldava Monastery was subjected once more to sword and fire. The silent struggle for the revival of the devastated place continued throughout the years of domination. In 1836 it was rebuilt for the last time and in that state it has reached us.

The monastery complex comprises a church with a belfry, living and utility premises and a wide yard. Big two-storey living buildings with open balconies and a high stone wall encircle the cobblestone paved yard. The high domeless stone church with a wide narthex rises in the centre. Particularly interesting is its open arcade next to which aspires the belfry.

The church is richly painted by the Bulgarian revival painter Krustyu Zahariev and his sons in the 1836—1840 period, which is corroborated by an inscription above the entrance. The murals in light pastel hues are executed with great artistry. Professor Assen Vassilev maintains that, done parallel with the wall paintings of Zahari Zograf in Bachkovo Monastery in 1840, the Mouldava murals are by far superior.

Very interesting is the donor's portrait of Petko H. Nedelkov and his son Nedelcho of Chirpan, painted left of the western wall of the narthex. Father and son are depicted standing, in typical folk costumes worn by the hundreds of donors of the Monastery. The murals cover on the outside the seven columns and the vaults of the arcade, as well as the western wall. Under the southern portico, the creators of the Slavonic letters, Cyril and Methodious, are painted on either side of the entrance.

The rich interior decoration of the church testifies to the improved economic status and the national self-awareness of the Bulgarian population in the Assenovgrad county in the 19th c. The church houses nine icons from 1836 done by the Tryavna icon-painter Petur Manyuv, who was in perfect command of the icon-painting technique.

During the years of Ottoman domination the St Petka Monastery cherished dearly the Bulgairan national awareness and supported





the Bulgarian spirit. For centuries manuscripts and incunabula were preserved in its library. Most of these books were later ravaged and destroyed by the Phanariots.

The long history of the Monastery is connected with the struggles of the people in the Assenovgrad region. The detachment of Angel Voivode and of Zhelyu Tyanev had repeatedly found shelter in it. Teacher Sava Katrafilov met with the peasants from the neighbouring villages there and awakened in them their national consciousness.

Vassil Levski is said to have visited the Rhodopean villages of Lenovo, Malevo, Novakovo and Cherven. On his way there Levski took shelter in the Monastery. Fresh evidence of these secret visits of the Apostle of Freedom there was the hiding place discovered in 1975, which was connected with the abbot's quarters and the big monastery storeroom in the cellar.

The memory of Levski's visit to the Monastery is handed down from generation to generation. On February 17, 1935 the tourist clubs in Assenovgrad and Plovdiv for the first time organized a one-day outing to the Monastery to commemorate the death of the Apostle. Ever since such an outing has been organized every year to mark with gratitude the patriotic role played by Mouldava Monastery through the centuries.

During the 1876 April Uprising bullets were cast there and squibs were made, food and arms were stored. In the Liberating Russo-



Turkish War the Bashibazouk hordes plundered the Monastery again and it escaped an arson only by a miracle.

In the first years after the Liberation this stronghold of the Bulgarian national spirit continued to be an educational centre. In the summer of 1881 a temporary pedagogical course for village teachers was organized in the Konoushko-Roupchos region. Lectures were delivered by the prominent pedagogues from Assenovgrad, Atanas Mishev and Tasko Memedichkov. In the 1883/1884 academic year a popular school for the children of poor families from the region opened there; it was supported by the municipality and the church boards.

The St Petka Monastery is a monument of culture of national importance. It is now a convent.



There is no organized transport to the monastery.
A guide is available from the „Bezovo“ Tourist Cluh.
For information call 2-38-67.

THE ST NEDELYA MONASTERY



The St. Nedelya Church

This is the only monastery in Bulgaria which rises as a medieval fortress amidst an open plain, 6 km eastwards from Assenovgrad and near the village of Zlatovruh. Founded in 1856 as a simple monastic community near the existing curative spring, in 1868 it already grew into a whole monastery complex. The people living at the foot of the Rhodopes and in the entire Thracian Lowlands took part in its construction with donations and voluntary labour. The buildings and the church were erected by master builders from Yugovo, under chief master Stoyan Atanasov Goudevski (Ouzounov), one of the most famous builders throughout Thrace.

Very impressive are the living premises with their variety of form and style, with the different in height storeys and the original wooden balconies. A two-storey tower rises in the southern part of the Monastery, whose construction is linked in people's memory with the name of Angel Voivode.

In the centre of the broad yard encircled with living and utility premises and with massive stone walls, a big three-apse church stands, with a dome and a narthex, built in 1859. The church is 22 long, 10 m wide and the dome is 13 m high. The walls are made of hewn stone blocks 30×50 cm in size, arranged in a symmetrical

pattern. A structure of six stone columns carries the roof. The floor is paved with marble slabs. The big iconostasis at the altar and the four smaller ones at the columns are also done by Stoyan Ouzounov.

The St Nedelya Monastery is remarkable mainly for the mural paintings of the church done by the famous Revival artists Alexi Atanassov and Georgi Danchov the Zograf. More than 150 compositions are depicted on the walls of the church. Saints, martyrs, biblical scenes and many episodes from the life of Cyril and



The Patriarchs, wall painting by Georgi Danchov

Methodius and St John of Rila are painted there. The talented painter Georgi Danchov, driven by strong patriotic feelings, for the first time in the history of Bulgarian painting did not create canonized images of SS Cyril and Methodius. He showed them as creators of the Slavonic alphabet, as baptizers of Prince Boris I, as enlighteners of the people. In two of the compositions Bulgairan peasants in typical folks costumes are depicted listening attentively to the sermon of the first teachers. Very expressive are the scenes of the death and burial of Cyril and Methodius. The images of many Bulgarian saints are painted too: Ilarion of Muglen, Marko-Bishop of Preslav, Theophilact Patriarch of Turnovo, Euthymius-Patriarch of Turnovo, Manasses of Gabrovo, etc.

The money for the painting of the church was donated and the names of the donors were put down in the gift-givers' inscriptions above the northern and southern entrance of the church.

Outside the monastery yard, close to the northern gates there is an old curative spring with a chapel also painted with murals. The scene of the baptizing of Prince Boris I is repeated there, but in a different composition.



Scenes from the life of brothers Cyril and Methodius, murals by Georgi Danchov



The St Nedelya Monastery





The Monastery's ayazmo



The churchyard with the tower of Angel Voivode



The St Nedelya Monastery kept the national consciousness alive and played an important role in the struggle with the Phanariot oppression. Engravings were stamped there and distributed in the country. In the school, which opened in 1868, such patriotic-minded teachers as Stoyan Djansuzov, Sava Katrafilov, etc. taught the children of the poor Bulgarians to become teachers and priests. Archimandrite Gervassiy, who often travelled to Russia; Archimandrite Gerassim Rilets, a personal acquaintance of Hristo Botev; Deacon Vikentiy, follower of Vassil Levski and a close friend of priest Mincho Kunchev, served in the Monastery. In the 1871—1872 period the Apostle of Freedom, Vassil Levski, took shelter in the Monastery.

In 1877 the Monastery was burned down and robbed by the withdrawing Turkish troops. Only the church and the tower survived. The living wing and the utility premises were rebuilt after the Liberation. The rich and original architecture of the living premises, the national character of the mural paintings in the church executed with great artistic skill, make the St Nedelya Monastery a place of interest and a remarkable architectural and artistic monument of the Bulgarian National Revival Period.



TRANSPORT:

The bus service to the Zlatovruh and Izbegli villages (every hour),
Telephones: 93—322-270, 93-322-271

Restoration works are under way carried out by the Research
Institute for Monuments
of Culture, the Plovdiv Branch Division

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CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE in the Assenovgrad country

a guidebook

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